it, and as a result it had got clogged and fouled. One day he fired it off in a moment of exuberance and the barrel burst about eight inches from the muzzle. I took the damaged weapon to the R.A.F. armourer's shop and got him to saw the top part of the barrel off. Thus shortened, it made an excellent short-range weapon, effective at 200 yards, though it went off with a violent explosion and had a recoil like an elephant gun. In addition to the .303, Sparkes had brought a Webley, and Cranley a Colt automatic. Thus for several minutes we amused ourselves by taking shots at a stake we had fixed in the ground fifty yards away, to the applause and amusement of a group of Arab labourers from the date plantations.

Five camels approached our resting place from the other side of the creek, and through my Zeiss glasses I saw that one of the two riders was the Khan Sahib. As soon as he rode up, he explained that he had hired them from a nearby village and suggested that we should proceed to Mahrid on the backs of these scraggy-looking beasts. I had never ridden a camel before, and was not encouraged by the venemously sly look which the leading she-camel gave me; she had a rich fawn coat, bared in patches around her scrawny haunches by distemper, and she chewed viciously at her bridle with yellow teeth. However, I crawled on to her back, Cranley scrambling up behind me, and the rest of the party followed suit. Suleman Beg was left in charge of the truck. The caravan then started the journey to Mahrid. The owner of the camels, who took the lead, set off at a loping canter which I found most uncomfortable when I tried to emulate him. After a few miles I began to feel rather sick, and was glad when, an hour and a half later, the little seaport of Mahrid hove into sight. When I jumped off my steed I began to scratch violently, for the camel's hair was infested with fleas.

The Khan Sahib sent one of his seamen back to the battle-wagon with tins of petrol, which the men carried on top of their heads, and invited us inside his house. It was a cool plaster building of typical Arab design, with glassless windows protected by iron bars. A large, iron-studded teak gate led into an open courtyard, with stone steps leading up to the main living room on the left wing. This was a barely furnished chamber, with Shiraz rugs on the floor, a solitary Turkish inlaid table, and some wooden benches. We sat down and gratefully imbibed glasses of cool sherbet, enjoying the sea breeze that blew in through the windows. Arab children in the village street peered through the grating at us, begging, as they invariably do, for baksheesh, until the Khan Sahib, uttering a 'roh, zitat', sent them scampering away.

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the surrounding country, and Stanton took several photographs. 000
A large brown eagle hovered curiously above us as we stood there, circling high above the peaks, and it appeared that its eyrie was in some near-by chimney. The crevice widened above us and was floored with loose stones and boulders, suggesting that at one time a mountain stream had flowed through here on its way to the foothills from some watershed. There were even a few clumps of grass and small mountain flowers, sustained by water which dripped from the roof of a cave above. While I was gazing at the view, Stanton disappeared. Annoyed at the delay which this would entail, for we should by now have begun our return journey to the Khan Sahib's house, I shouted for him to turn back. There was no reply, however, so I began to follow him up the crevice.

After a climb of five minutes, I found Stanton awaiting me at the top of the crevice. He was very excited and pointed ahead of him. Raising myself on the ledge, I looked down on a surprising sight. Below us, hemmed in by high peaks,* was a plateau or bowl- 563
shaped valley in which cattle were grazing in the long grass. The 609
sight was so lovely and so unexpected that I could not suppress a cry of admiration. A little stream, crystal clear, meandered through the valley, issuing as a miniature waterfall from the rocks. Along its banks grew dwarf camel thorns, acacias and clumps of mountain daisies. There were no human beings in sight, but near the cliff edge we noticed a hut-like habitation in front of which rose the blue smoke of a wood fire.

'This must be one of the *Shi'hou* encampments,' Stanton whispered eagerly. 'I'd give anything for a photograph of one of the blighters. Do you realize that very few white men have ever seen them?'

I shrugged impatiently and pointed out that it was nearly three o'clock already. We had promised the Khan Sahib that we should be ready to leave for Mahrid at three and pick up our cars. There was no controlling Stanton's eagerness, however. He was a much younger man than I, he had never been East before, and he was determined to take as many photographs of Arabs as his film ration would allow. Before I could restrain him he had scrambled down into the valley and was making towards the hut. I reached him just as he was focusing his lens. At that moment the figure of a woman, unveiled and clad in filthy rags, rushed shrieking out of the hut and made towards a cave in the hillside.

*In the hills near Ras-al-Khaimah --Analyst

[Shi'hou]

563 The situation was getting a little out of hand. I seized Stanton
609 by the arm and urged him back towards the crevice up which we had come. Hardly had we reached the end of the valley when a dozen emaciated Arabs, with long beards, and rifles in their hands, suddenly appeared from behind a row of neam trees. They were slowly moving towards the entrance to the crevice, from which they must have watched us emerge, intent on cutting off our retreat. Before we could draw our revolvers one of them had fired his rifle, the bullet striking the rock cliff behind us.

Stanton yelled and dashed towards a hole in the rocks. We ran like hares to the cave, bullets spattering the rocks all round us, and reached the entrance just in time. We held a brief council of war and decided that, with a dozen rounds each, we could just about hold our own, since the cave was a natural fort and was better suited for defence than for attack. To our consternation the twelve *Shi'hou* were soon joined by about twenty more armed men who began to creep towards our hiding place. We realized that it was useless to try and shoot our way out, and replacing our
142 revolvers in their holsters, awaited the outcome. The *Shi'hou*, who by now stood outside the cave yelling and gesticulating with their rifles, were an extraordinary-looking lot. Shorter than the average Arab, they had a much wilder look, with long hair and beards.
[411] Each man carried a curious little axe, no bigger than a hammer, attached to a long pole. Their faces were rounder and much less Semitic than the Arabs', and of a reddish-brown colour. A few strips of cotton saved them from complete nudity, and their arms and legs were covered with silver rings.

563 The only member of the tribe who wore a head-dress—a strip
609 of dirty white cloth worn in the manner of a turban—stepped forward and spoke to us in the strange dialect of his tribe. I knew some Arabic and recognized one word which, roughly translated, meant 'Come out'. As we left the cave and stood before him they yelled more wildly than before, no doubt demanding our blood as the price of violating the sanctity of their hills. The headman silenced them and began to jabber at us violently, gesticulating fiercely with his hands. After five minutes of this haranguing, he seemed to realize that we did not understand him and glared at us impatiently.

486 'What about the *ghuli chit*?' Stanton whispered in my ear, and
563 I suddenly remembered the pass which the Sheikh of Sharjah had provided me with. This was a piece of paper, headed with the

[Shi 'hou]

sheikh's name and address in Arabic, and a statement in the same language to the effect that the bearer had his permission to travel through Oman without let or hindrance. It also offered dire penalties, including the amputation of the right hand, to any who dared to show violence to the bearer. Unfolding this rather dirty piece of paper I handed it to the headman. He held it gingerly in his fingers, gazing at it suspiciously, and pretended to read it although it was upside down. With a shrug he then handed it to another tribesman, but this man could make nothing of the document either.

Although they could not understand Arabic script, I think they must have had some inkling of its meaning, for they began a violent altercation amongst themselves. One of them suddenly pointed in the direction of Ras-al-Khaimah, and then at us. Beginning to get rather tired of all this pantomime, I decided to take decisive measures. There is a rule in the desert, at least among the Bedouins, that if you are attacked you should seize the garment of the most respectable Arab and cry: '*Daheel*', which means 'protection'. Under the unwritten laws of Arab hospitality, he is obliged to keep you in safe custody for at least twenty-four hours. The principle is not unlike that obtaining in the Middle Ages, when the outlaw could enter a church and claim sanctuary from the clergy.

I had no idea how it would work with the *Shi'hou*, but I was determined to try. Dashing forward I seized the scanty hem of the headman's *kufiyeh* and yelled '*Daheel*' at the top of my voice. To my surprise the old man's face was suddenly contorted with fear, and he stepped back as though I had struck him a blow. His rapid action resulted in a piece of the rotten cloth coming away in my hands and he was left almost naked. The effect of his predicament on the other *Shi'hou* was astonishing. At first amazement, then amusement, was written on their faces. Some grinned widely, others burst into shrieks of laughter. Even the headman, who had covered up his bare limbs as best he could with a few shreds of cloth, was grinning sheepishly. All signs of hostility had vanished. With a gesture the headman beckoned us towards the hut from which the shrieking woman had emerged.

Closely followed by a still laughing bodyguard, we marched towards the hut. The headman entered first, directing us to follow him. It was dark and dirty inside as well as hot and foul-smelling. Our hosts squatted on the bare floor in a circle, which we joined.

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It was, indeed, a month of incidents. Several members of my Indian staff fell sick; I had trouble with the Sikh carpenters who had been sent from Karachi to re-build one of the launches, and they had to be sent back; the Bedouins had encamped on the sandhills between Sharjah and Dubai, and were giving trouble to our convoys; one of the turbines of the power station broke down, and a sit-down strike among the Arab workmen held up the work of building the new staff quarters' block. I had already been criticized by headquarters for not speeding up this work, which was not my responsibility but that of the Public Works Department.

The excuse given by the senior engineer was that shortage of materials was responsible for the delay, but on investigation it transpired that lack of proper supervision was the real cause of the trouble. The overseer was an Assyrian, and he had little authority over the Arabs, who would work only when they were closely watched. Directly the overseer's back was turned they would sit on the roof and go to sleep. The foundations and walls had been erected months ago, but the building was still roofless in May; as a result, the wooden frames of the doors and windows were beginning to shrink and crack. Eventually the supervision was put in charge of an R.A.F. corporal—a native of Cardiff—and within two weeks the Arabs were working like slaves and the roof was finished.

During this period I had numerous visitors who were far from welcome, but whom I had to entertain for political reasons. The Sheikh of Sharjah usually came twice a week, bringing his sons and secretary with him. As his visits usually lasted for two hours it meant that my morning's work was set aside. It was customary to serve him with fruit and coffee, either in the mess or on the roof-garden of the Fort, and on each occasion he managed to consume our total supplies of fruit. Quite often the bearers had to raid our staff supplies, from bedroom tables, in order to satiate his greed. I was obliged to sit through this gorging performance and make polite conversation.

The Sheikh's visits always had an underlying motive; either he wanted to borrow spare parts for his car, or wished the radio officer to repair his wireless set; sometimes he wanted me to order him some fruit from India, or give him a supply of vegetable plants and flowers. When he sat in the mess, he invariably removed copies of *The Tatler* or *Country Life*, although he could read neither of these publications. These visits were made in ceremonial dress,

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including gold swords and daggers, and he was accompanied by his ruffianly guard—who also expected coffee. There was nothing informal about Sheikh Sultan, and each time he came to the Fort I was obliged to make a rapid change from shorts and bush shirt into my palm beach uniform.

The Sheikh of Dubai, who never asked any favours but who once sent me two beautiful pearls as a gift, paid but one visit to the Fort. That was in the company of all the sheikhs of the Trucial Oman Coast, who assembled there to meet the British Resident, Sir Geoffrey Prior, and journey with him to the neutral territory of Baraimi, where he held a 'durbar'. Next to Sultan bin Saqr, my most frequent visitor was the picturesque Sheikh of Ajman, Raschid bin Hamid, a handsome man of thirty, who resembled the pre-Raphælite portraits of Christ. He was tall for an Arab, with an aristocratic bearing and clean-cut features. Of pure Bedouin stock, he had their fair skin and piercing blue eyes, and wore a carefully oiled and trimmed black beard. Raschid was the only sheikh in Oman to own horses, which are not suited to this part of the Arabian desert; he was a superb horseman and a great hunter.

Sheikh Raschid had a tremendous sense of humour and I believe he only came to the Fort to plague me. He would arrive at the most unexpected and inconvenient times, bringing with him a ruffianly rabble of hangers-on, including his chief minister, or wazir, Hussein, a grimy looking old villain who spoke a few words of execrable English. Sultan bin Saqr, who was his overchief, did not approve of these visits, since Raschid was only a sub-chief of Ajman, a small dependency of Sharjah. Raschid was full of intrigue, and was believed to be making secret agreements with the Americans, authorizing them to drill for oil on his territory; this was strictly against the treaty which Sultan bin Saqr had signed with the British Government and gave rise to considerable local embarrassment. The wily Raschid knew quite well that he could not implement his promises, and yet had no scruples in taking money for these illegal concessions.

The Khan Bahadur asked me on one occasion to try and discourage Raschid from paying his tiresome visits to the Fort, but he was so persistent that the task was a well-nigh impossible one. It was impossible to offend him; if one were at all brusque he would roar with laughter, take one by the arm and begin a long discussion about his latest hunting trip. I liked him immensely, for he was

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really a most lovable ruffian, his Christ-like face contrasting oddly with the fanatical fire in his eyes. Hussein, his minister, despite his dirty clothes and unkempt beard, also amused me very much; he carried a huge sword, whilst his belt was always bulging with weapons—knives, Muscat daggers, and a Mauser pistol. He was the living embodiment of Captain Teach, the eighteenth century pirate.

Sheikh Raschid was always pestering me to visit his 'palace' at Ajman and accompany him on a gazelle hunt so, partly in order to placate him and partly because I liked the rascal, I eventually agreed to accept his invitation. I chose a week-end in May when, owing to bad weather at Barhain and Karachi, aircraft had been held up for a few days. Ellis, the Station Engineer, who had performed several tasks for the sheikh, was also invited, and we made arrangements to set off in one of the cars after lunch. A few minutes before we were due to leave the Fort three camels put in an appearance. The servant who brought them explained that Sheikh Raschid bin Hamid considered that they would be more comfortable for the journey.

As a rule I dislike riding camels; I consider they are one of the most uncomfortable modes of transport ever discovered. In this case, however, I was glad of them. The route to Ajman lies through tracks of deep, soft sand, in which the tyres of vehicles invariably get stuck. To extricate them is a long and difficult task, frequently requiring the aid of another vehicle. Soft sand is far worse than mud, and even if the wheels do not sink in it, they slip and slither all over the place, so that it is a matter of extreme luck if you do not hit a palm tree or a rock. Wheel chains are of little help, as they seem to plunge the car deeper into the sand. The only way to negotiate soft sand successfully is to drive at great speed and take a zig-zag course.

Ajman lay to the north of Sharjah, beyond the little fishing village of Hera; the distance was not more than five miles but the camels were slow and it took us an hour to reach the outskirts of the town. There are two Ajmans on the map—the town proper and the district surrounding it, which has an area of about ten square miles. Most of it is bare desert, full of *wadhis* and sandhills, but near the sea-shore there are flourishing date plantations, whereas Sharjah does not boast a single one.

The town is much pleasanter than Sharjah. The track leading to it is indescribably bad, being full of pot-holes, old wells, rocks

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000 rarely away from the desert; he lives quite alone and does not invite the society of his fellow-countrymen, except when he is in Bahrain, where he is obliged to live the conventional social life. He habitually wears Arab dress, eats Arab food and sleeps in a tent. Although virtually unknown to the general public, this man, who exerts as much influence on the Arabs as Lawrence of Arabia ever did, is a personal friend of Bertram Thomas, and is a respected figure in Bahrain. Lermitte seldom visits Europeans in the Gulf and it was a great occasion, therefore, when he consented to dine with me at the Fort one evening. As he sat in my room after dinner, recounting fascinating tales of his experiences in the desert, I felt as near to hero-worship as I have ever been. Maharajahs, a Cabinet Minister, millionaires, major-generals, air chief marshals, peers and an ambassador have sat in that room, drinking my whisky and smoking my cheroots, yet to my mind they were mere nobodies compared with this grave, enigmatical little man who could travel a thousand miles over the desert, with thousands of pounds in his pockets, without being molested.

674 On the way back to our launch, Bernard, an Indian traffic
609 clerk who had accompanied us on the journey to Dubai, told me that a relative of his was murdered a few weeks ago. An Indian merchant of Dubai, he was lured into the desert sixty miles away, by a letter which asked him to visit an encampment of Bedouin tribesmen who wished to purchase several hundred sacks of flour. When he arrived at the encampment he was taken into a tent and stabbed in the back. He had foolishly brought several thousand rupees with him, and this was stolen. The crime was reported to the Political Officer, but no trace was ever found of the assailants. Bedouin treachery is not unknown and these tribesmen have been responsible for several murders of foreigners.

A few years ago a British official, Colonel Leachman, attended a conference of Arab chiefs. Agreement could not be reached on a certain point and one of the sheikhs began to abuse the British Government; Colonel Leachman momentarily lost his temper, and one of the sheikh's sons crept behind him and drove a dagger into his heart. This incident was described to me by Lermitte, who was a great friend of Leachman's. It is a lesson for all who would have dealings with the Arabs. Lermitte himself is always calm and good-humoured; he will sit with the Arabs in their tents for hours without speaking, and they say of him that he has 'an understanding silence'.

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all the fun that he could out of desert life, yet he worked exceedingly hard and devoted several hours each day to the study of Arabic.

Tandy had been instructed to pay a visit to Djaidh to discuss with the tribal leaders the continuation of work on the wells which irrigate the large date plantations for which this district is famous. Djaidh, which is not a village but a district, lies about fifty miles east of Sharjah on the direct camel route, but the sand tracks are extremely soft for vehicular traffic and Tandy had chosen a circular route by way of Falat-al-'Ali and Muraq-quibat, where the road is reasonably good and has a hard surface. It added twenty miles to the journey, but the extra comfort and ease of travel compensated for this.

I had been invited to join the party, since Captain Tandy had expectations of meeting Sheikh Mahommed bin Ali, ruler of the wild Beni Quitab tribe of Bedouins. I had often expressed a wish to see this chief, whose fierceness and bold character were celebrated in Oman; I never expected to have this privilege, for the Beni Quitab lived in remote and inaccessible parts of the desert, mostly at the foothills of the Jebel-al-Faiyah range, and were continually changing their camping-ground. It was reported, moreover, that they were hostile to foreigners and that Sheikh Mahommed had met only two Europeans, one of them being Sir Geoffrey Prior, the British Resident, who had difficulty in finding him. Arabs are very chary of giving information to foreigners concerning the whereabouts of Bedouin tribes, presumably because they fear reprisals.

Owing to the waterless nature of Oman—which is, geographically, merely a coastal extension of the Great Southern Desert, or Rub-al-Khali—date plantations of any appreciable size are rare. On the Oman Gulf side of the peninsula, and at Muscat, they flourish to such an extent that their export forms one of the staple industries of this part of south-east Arabia, but west of the Shimailiyah the only large plantations are at Falaj-al-'Ali and Djaidh, where their ownership is shared by the tribes in common. Djaidh is neutral territory, but the responsibility for managing the plantations is divided between the Sheikhs of Sharjah and Kalba; the Sheikh of Ras-al-Khaimah is responsible for the plantations at Falaj-al-'Ali, although the Sheikh of Umm-al-Quwain has some interest in this plantation. The district is inhabited by Kalba tribesmen, who live in encampments near the wells; they are responsible, through their headmen or sub-chiefs, for the maintenance of the irrigation

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none. Our most amusing find was that of a *dhabbi*, a small yellow lizard with a spatulate tail, which it uses as a spade for burrowing into the sand; it also uses this tail as a paddle and can travel quite fast by this means. Various species of reptiles are found in this region, including a large grey lizard, measuring almost four feet at full growth, the flesh of which is edible. Among snakes there is the common adder and a species of krait, smaller than the Indian genus, but highly poisonous. We saw none of these on this journey, however.

We returned to our cars and were about fifteen miles beyond Umm-al-Quwain and in sight of the plantations of Falaj-al-'Ali when we came upon the camp of the Anti-Locust Commission. We hoped to see Joyce, but he was away in the desert towards Shinas, and we spoke instead to his foreman, an Indian entymologist from Bombay. He told us that they had completed their work of collecting and checking specimens in the area, and were now laying traps and arsenical baits. They boasted that they would destroy at least ninety-five per cent of the larvæ in this district, which I found hard to believe. The foreman mentioned that his party would remain in the desert for twenty-one days and had just enough rations for that period.

The members of the Commission, who are all Indians except Captain Joyce, receive about four rupees a day in addition to their rations and equipment. When they penetrate far into the interior guides and guards are provided by the sheikhs of the locality, at suitable remuneration. These guides will never enter the territory of another tribe, so that fresh arrangements have to be made for each tribal area. The party seldom suffered from molestation, partly because Captain Joyce invariably goes ahead of them and makes arrangements with the tribes for their safety, but they are not popular with the Bedouins; this is partly because they do not trust foreigners, even Indians, and partly because they do not believe they are hunting for locusts. Even Sheikh Mahommed, who is a highly intelligent man, told me that he suspected they were secretly searching for minerals or making maps. From the propertied sheikhs, on the other hand, the Commission receives every assistance, as they are anxious to keep the pests away from their crops. The Bedouins, who do no work and grow nothing but a little millet or tobacco, are not interested in locust suppression; in fact, locusts form a part of their diet.

Falaj-al-'Ali lay five miles beyond the camp, but we skirted the

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which they smoke in tiny pipes with cane stems. The sheikh also collects 'protection' money from the neighbouring sheikhs, in return for which the Beni Quitab guarantee not to molest the tribesmen. Should this money not be forthcoming, however, a raid on the nearest town or village is a foregone conclusion; then slaves and camels will be stolen, to be sold later in the Baraimi market.

Tandy reported that he had detected a trail of smoke in the distance, so we decided to keep on our course. Eventually we reached a fenced-in enclosure, at one end of which was a low clay wall; leaning against the wall was an aged, toothless Arab. For a few leaves of tobacco he agreed to lead us to the *Badu* encampment. To our surprise it lay but a hundred yards to our right, screened from view by a hedge of scrubs. As we approached the goats'-skin tents of the tribesmen, a group of armed men calmly awaited us.

'Praise be to Allah! And who may you be?' enquired the elder of the guards.

'Praise be to Allah, and peace be on your heads!' replied Tandy, in his best Arabic, holding out his hand as a token of friendship. 'We come from the British Government, and are friends of Sheikh Mohammed bin Ali—may the blessings of Allah give peace to his old age! We desire you to take us to him.'

The guards nodded gravely at this speech and, hedging us in on either side, conducted us towards the main tent. There was a curious air of silence about the encampment; none of the occupants came out to stare at us and the only signs of activity were some chickens and goats in a pen, and the tethered camels which snarled as we passed. As we waited outside the flap of the tent opened and Hadi, the sheikh's son, emerged. He greeted Sheikh Hamid as an old friend and was introduced by him to Jasim, Tandy and the remainder of the party. Hadi expressed surprise at the visit, which he said was unexpected; his father and the older members of the tribe were asleep, and the others were out hunting.

The tent, which he invited us to enter, was a small, ramshackle affair of goats'-hair and sacking tied over *gharf* branches; a cheap Dubai mat lay on the floor. No sooner were we seated than the local notables came in to meet us and we had to rise on each occasion, nearly knocking the tent over as we did so. At length they were all assembled, seated around the floor in a circle. With twenty men in such a small space the atmosphere soon became suffocatingly hot, and the situation was not improved by the hundreds of flies

which buzzed around us. These *Badu*, whose ages ranged from twenty to eighty years of age, were all bearded and very dirty; although they were the notables of the camp, their clothing was ragged and scanty, and my preconceptions of the romantic nomad's life they led quickly vanished. They were, if the truth be told, mere gipsies of the desert, as wild and treacherous as the nomad can be.

Sheikh Hadi, who had left us to be stared at by these strange creatures, who plucked at their beards and whispered to one another (Tandy's bare legs were a subject of much scandalized comment), presently reappeared with his father. Sheikh Mohammed bin Ali, ruler of all the Beni Quitab tribes of Oman, was a magnificent figure, in spite of his eighty years. Over six feet tall, thin and sinewy, he had a flowing white beard and a pair of the keenest eyes I have ever seen. His face, dominated by a sharp, hawk-like nose, was the colour of old parchment and revealed great character and power. All stood up as he entered the tent, stooping low at the entrance, and there was a long silence as we were introduced by Sheikh Hamid.

When the Sheikh Mohammed had taken his place in the circle we returned to our squatting position, while Tandy alone conversed with the sheikh about the weather, the state of the crops and the health of the camels. The rest of us did not speak, eyeing the gnarled face of Mohammed, with its great, hooked nose and deep-set eyes, with something approaching awe. Then something which Tandy said made the old man laugh and the spell was broken. Cigarettes were produced and a babel of conversation broke loose. Tandy got down to business and discussed local politics, the irrigation project at Djaidh, and finally, realizing that the old man was in a good humour, asked him if he would provide guides for the Anti-Locust Commission, which wanted to enter the mountain pass beyond Jebel Faiyah.

'Praise Allah, but they are spies, these Indians!' the sheikh laughed. 'They want to map out my land and then build huts on it, like they did at Sharjah. Next, your Government will want to flatten the ground to make a nest for the great sky-birds, *ti-ara* (aeroplanes). Truly, the ways of Allah are mysterious and wonderful, but the ways of the foreigner are cunning.' The others considered this speech a huge joke, and laughed and applauded. Then Tandy, who is no mean diplomat, suggested that the Beni Quitab were afraid that the Anti-Locust party, by

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poisoning the larvæ, would destroy the tribe's food supply. This produced more laughter, since the locust is only regarded as an occasional tit-bit and is not a regular part of their diet. The sheikh pulled his beard, roared with laughter at this sally, revealing his long, yellow fangs, and finally agreed to provide as many guides as the party required.

A shout from one of the guards caused Hadi to leap to his feet and run towards the entrance. He returned in a moment to inform us that a caravan of raiders, presumably *Badus*, had passed the encampment about a mile away. We hurriedly left the tent and were just in time to see the raiding party, which consisted of about fifty camels, disappearing in the dust at great speed. Hadi said they were moving in the direction of Dubai and probably had as their objective one of the numerous villages near the coast. Sheikh Mohammed denied that they were men of his tribe, but Tandy afterwards told me that there was some doubt as to the truth of this statement.

When we returned to the tent, a slave brought in bowls of warm camels' milk which were passed round the circle. It was very refreshing and had a sweet taste, though I did not relish drinking from the bowl after it had passed the lips of my exceedingly dirty hosts. In few, if any books on desert travel is the dirtiness of the Arabs referred to; this is either because the authors have become enured to their primitive surroundings and take them for granted, or else because they consider it bad form to allow such commonplace details to intrude into their art. Both St. John Philby and Mr. Bertram Thomas are liberal in their allusions to camel dung, but their awareness of the filth and odours of Arab towns is never made apparent to the reader. Unfortunately I was born with a fastidious mind and a nose as sensitive as an insect's antennæ, and no amount of admiration for the Arabs can make me oblivious of their habits, although some Arabs are far cleaner than many Europeans.

When the bowls of milk had been passed round we were pressed to partake of dates, covered thickly with flies, little squares of Turkish delight, chipatties with a coating of *ghi*, and good Arab coffee. After a smoke and some light conversation, we had more coffee, until Tandy, reminding the sheikh that we must take our departure, asked permission to leave. There was a very strong smell of camel in the tent; the creatures were tethered to ropes outside, and were growling and swearing because they were being

574 609 milked. The remnants of our meal were soon gobbled up by a crowd of retainers and servants who had been hanging around the tent door, impatiently awaiting our departure. Sheikh Mohammed was exceedingly pleased to receive a gift of two 2-cwt. bags of white flour which Tandy had brought in the car, a present from the British Government.

[777] I had wished to take a photograph of the sheikh and managed to do so when he was not looking; the old man greatly objected to cameras, as he believed that an enemy, by looking at the print, could cause him evil by witchcraft. He is extremely superstitious and, had he seen my camera, would have demanded its destruction. As it was we parted on the best of terms, the sheikh and his retainers 600 walking with us as far as the car. The sun was beginning to drop behind the sand-dunes as we left, casting a rosy glow over the foothills of Jebel-al-Faiyah, so we sped along the rough track at top speed, stopping at the wells to say good-bye to the headman, and at the derelict fort near Djaidh to take a photograph—which did not come out, as I had foolishly forgotten to turn the film. Twelve miles from Djaidh our truck broke down (we found out later that water had got into the carburettor), and we prepared for a night in the desert, collecting dead tree stumps and dry branches of acacia to light a fire.

The sun fell sharply behind the sandhills, making long shadows on the dunes, and the mountains turned purple and then black. Venus and Sirius gleamed like diamonds, and the sickle of a new moon shone with the radiance of polished silver; the stars in the desert sky were unusually bright and we gazed at Aldebaran, the Pleiades, Orion's Belt, Castor and Pollux, the Heavenly Twins. The fire burned up fiercely, for there was a chilly sea breeze, and we huddled together round it, eating an Arab sweetmeat which Jasim produced.

We were about to make a rough tent out of our coats and a sheet from the truck and settle down for the night, when our driver called out that he saw a light ahead. It was a speck of white in the distance, but it soon grew larger and we saw that it was the glare of a car's headlamps. We switched on our own lights and made a signal. When it drove up, it turned out to be one of the Anti-Locust Commission's trucks. They had awaited our return and, when darkness fell, had correctly assumed that we had had a breakdown and had come out to help us. We were unable to repair our own vehicle, having no suitable tools, so,

481 rose-pink downs and grass-covered depressions covered with the
133 charming *zahr* plant. The going was difficult and no vehicle other than a jeep could have made it; in addition to the soft sand, there were sudden outcrops of exposed rock at the base of the sand-ridges, termed by the Arabs *shuqqa*, and on several occasions we were nearly hurled out of our seats by these obstructions.

361 After five hours of hard driving we reached the fringe of the
609 large oasis of Baraimi, and left our car by a clump of palm trees while our guide went forward to spy out the lie of the land. He returned after an interval of fifteen minutes to report that he had
[561] identified several notorious slave dealers of the Beni Quitab tribe, but could find no signs of a market or slaves. He advised us that the inhabitants were liable to be hostile, in spite of Sir Geoffrey's recent visit, and suggested that we should return as speedily as possible.

Schultz and I had no mind to go back without seeing something of the celebrated 'town', which is in reality a collection of mud huts and tents built around the wells, although there is a small fortified building and we saw one or two shops in the open bazaar; we therefore decided to ignore Abdul's fears. No sooner had we entered the oasis than we were surrounded by a curious crowd, all *Badus*, who insisted on following us to the bazaar.

[443] The bazaar was a temporary structure opened by migrant dealers for the sale of cheap cloths and foodstuffs, and there was little of interest for us to see. We looked around for the 'dungeon' in which slaves were reputed to be detained pending their sale, but beyond the small fort and one or two other coral buildings, could see nothing which resembled a prison. Among the crowd, however, we did notice several negroes whose legs bore the marks of iron chains and the healed scars of a lash, but they were quickly hurried out of sight at our approach and we were not allowed to
609 question them. When we attempted to enter the door of the fort the crowd's attitude became threatening and for a moment I thought they would attack us.

At length the head Bedouin came forward and asked us what we wanted in Baraimi. We replied that we were friends of Sheikh Mohammed bin Ali and had come to take photographs of the oasis. This appeared to satisfy him, but it was significant that we were not invited into any of the tents or asked to partake of coffee. Plainly, our presence was not desired, and when the headman coldly enquired whether it would not be advisable if we returned

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

to Dubai before sunset, we began to think that there was reason in his words. He accompanied us to the jeep, which we had some difficulty in starting, and we left less than an hour after our arrival. The scowling, muttering crowd watched us go until we had disappeared behind the dunes, and I must confess that until that moment I had a very uncomfortable feeling down my spine.

I had no further opportunity of visiting Baraimi except to pass through it on my journey to the Rub-al-Khali and, in fact, the Political Officer was somewhat annoyed when he learnt of our journey, since he is responsible for the safety of Europeans and other foreigners in the Trucial Coast. We were warned never again to venture into the interior without an official escort, but as Schultz and I were determined to penetrate the Rub-al-Khali before we left Arabia his warning, I am sorry to say, went unheeded.

However, it was no business of mine to investigate the slave traffic. The facts had been placed before the Political Officer and the Government of India must have been aware that abductions and slave-trading were being carried on in the interior, so the responsibility was theirs. I am aware that this disclosure may cause a certain amount of embarrassment in official quarters, but I consider that the British public should be made aware of practices, condemned by the League of Nations and decent-minded men and women, which still obtain in this humanitarian age in territories under the political control of the British Government.

2: O'Shea G-3 (1944-1945) 1947 MK4 Trucial Oman MK4

small oasis with wells and a date garden. We were presently joined by a crowd of Bedouins who peered at us in wonder, and when Hamid informed them that we were proceeding into the Rub-al-Khali they began to laugh. An aged *Badu*, who inspected our car with great interest, threw up his hands and shouted: 'Inshillah, but they must be mad!'

Mad or not, we were determined to proceed with our journey without delay and, as soon as our Arabs has said their midday prayers—with a special invocation for the protection of Allah during our entry into the unknown—we mounted our camels and set forth. Musa, the driver who was to take the car back to Sharjah, gave us a cheerful send-off, betraying relief that he was not included in the party, and leaving the caravan route on our right we cantered over the desert in the direction of Latir, the site of a disused well.

After five hours of fairly comfortable travel we reached the district known as Dhafra, which is composed of flat, waterless desert relieved by occasional dunes and patches of *andab* grass. We stopped here to allow the camels to graze and pitched our tents under the shoulder of a sandhill. We estimated that we were approximately a hundred miles south-west of Baraimi, and east of the Manasir desert. Schultz and I climbed to the top of a dune to watch the sun sink below the horizon; the desert stretched out on every side as far as the eye could see, and we appeared to be in the centre of a vast, treeless plain. A desert sunset is an unforgettable sight and quite unlike anything one sees in Europe; banners of scarlet and gold are unfurled in the sky, the clouds glow with a translucent iridescence, and, as the stars appear one by one, at first pale and glimmering, then with the brightness of white fire, a purple haze covers the desert. Shadows lengthen from the dunes until they merge in the twilight gloom and then, as if a curtain had been drawn across the world, night falls suddenly in folds of cold, black silence.

The next day we continued southwards through the Liwa region to Idd, where we were fortunate to find an old well with water at ten fathoms. It lay in a bush-covered hollow of the dunes and the cameleers set to with a will to open up the shaft which had fallen in. Hamid reckoned that the well had not been used for many years and was surprised to find any water there. He gave me a taste of it from his goat's-skin, but it was horribly brackish and I was glad we had a good supply in our water-bottles.